

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Serankure and Music in Tlokwen, Botswana*, by Jürgen Schöpf, Intercultural Music Studies 13, edited by Max Peter Baumann, Institute for Music Research, Julius-Maximilian University of Würzburg, Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, Berlin 2008, 279 pp., 108 pp. of music transcriptions, 5 photographs and 13-track DVD, 978-3-86135-645-5.

Another milepost in the revelation of traditional music styles in southern Africa is reached! This time it is the music of two Tswana musical styles, that of the *serankure* bowed trough zither and – although not featured in the title – that of the *ditlhaka* reedpipe dance, both of which seem to be just surviving in Botswana. Although the author's opinion is that the *serankure* is doomed to disappear, he supports the use of *ditlhaka* as classroom instruments.

This is a book of strength and weakness: strength in its thorough-going presentation of new material regarding these instruments, weakness in its detailed close-up focus on several performances of only four songs. These were performed by two *serankure* players and two *ditlhaka* groups. We learn everything that can be musicologically imagined about the songs, the instruments used, the musical structure, acoustics, tone system, lyrics, etc., with transcriptions *in extenso*, and beyond this a complete background picture (52 pp.) of the environment, history, culture and socio-political patterns of the Tswana people. This is all fine, in its complete but oddly old-fashioned ethnographic style, yet the pince-nez near focus leaves one wishing for a larger picture in which to place it, especially in its relationship with other Tswana, Sotho and southern African musical styles. Is the author trying too hard to be correct, or is the book taken straight from a doctoral thesis? The same material could have been presented in a short series of focused, unbuffered articles.

The strength, however, is that we now have some solid information on these two relatively unknown and endangered musical styles. To pick out some nuggets, opinions have appeared before on the acoustics of the elliptical bowing technique, where the player increases the tension of the bow hair to elicit higher notes, but Schöpf brings modern physics to bear on the technique, reinforced by his apparent (and understated) ability to play the *serankure* himself. He makes good comparative use of different performances of the same song by different people, and most usefully by the two different instruments, which is an excellent way of revealing background concepts. Another is the glossary of Tswana musical terms; and finally, most interesting to this reviewer, is the information about the *ditlhaka* reedpipe dance (pp. 101–8, 143–5), including the summary of its composition principles, which surely should bear comparison with Emmanuelle Olivier's ground-breaking discoveries regarding composition techniques in San (*Ju/hoansi*) singing, as well as with the Venda and Pedi reedpipe traditions. Together with its accompanying DVD and other relatively recent additions to the Tswana and Sotho

music archive, such as Michael Baird's CD of the *segankula* (the same trough zither) and *lesiba* blown bow, *Lesotho Calling* (SWP 033) and his Historical Recordings by Hugh Tracey series, *Tswana and Sotho Voices* (SWP017), as well as Robin Wells' book (1999), *An Introduction to the Music of Basotho*, the archive is growing!

Andrew Tracey, International Library of African Music

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*Focus: Music of South Africa*, by Carol A. Muller, 2nd ed., Routledge, New York 2008 (1st ed. 2004), Focus on World Music Series, edited by Michael B. Bakan, 338 pp., 56 photographs, with audio CD.

In the words of the Routledge series description the book "provides an in-depth look at the full spectrum of South African music, a musical culture that epitomizes the enormous ethnic, religious, linguistic, class and gender diversity of the nation itself ... looks at how South Africans have used music to express a sense of place in South Africa, on the African continent, and around the world." Carol Muller, Professor of Music (Ethnomusicology) at the University of Pennsylvania and a South African, gets some of the way towards this big aim by building on close-ups arising from her experience, such as the songs "Mbube" and "Graceland", the music styles *isicathamiya* and *maskanda*, gumboot dance, "Coloured" jazz from Cape Town, and the independent Shembe church. If most of these topics concern Zulu music, this is natural considering her birth, education and experience in the Zulu coastal region of South Africa. All are described in hands-on (and feet-on) detail, with empathy, respect and perception. The more general introductory sections are excellent and inclusive, while the later parts focus on Muller's several special areas of research.

Written first in the 1990s, the tone of the book remains in some way stuck there, that time of sudden discovery by South Africans, at our belated "independence", that we were part of Africa and yet strangers to it, looking for identity and connections, even inventing a new South African kind of unity with which to face the world. Muller's teaching at the University of Pennsylvania since 1998 must have sharpened her awareness of these issues, continually teaching young Americans about a country that did not know what it was.

This is a book that is easy to teach from; indeed, much of it must have grown from lecture notes. Muller addresses her students directly in places. Topics are introduced in wide angle, then in plenty of detail, with quotes. The copious keywords are in bold, and gathered together at the end of each chapter. Recordings are provided on the CD. One is aware of the author's presence, which gives a personal, mediated mood. The screen of focus is contemporary music; elements of the old traditions appear through it, but are not enlarged on. May we hope that the author tackles a complete "Focus: Music of South Africa" someday, perhaps in a third edition, including all this plus the whole range of musical styles of the interior.

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